

Ammon Bundy Launches New Antigovernment Organization That Takes on Coronavirus Restrictions

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by Hatewatch Staff

Antigovernment extremist Ammon Bundy, known for [his participation in multiple armed standoffs against the U.S. government](#), has a new venture. The group appears to be aimed in part at what Bundy considers government restrictions on personal liberties.

People's Rights seeks to build a nationwide network of right-wing, often antigovernment activists that can be called upon to quickly mobilize against perceived threats, according to the group's website and the descriptions by its national and regional leaders.

The group held an open meeting April 9 and created a Facebook page on April 13. It is headquartered in Idaho, where Bundy now resides.

The group's message, which has been shared across social media platforms, is that the U.S. government poses a great threat to the freedom and liberties of "the people," who need to be armed and ready to fend off these supposed tyrannical forces. The group has already staged several protests at government meetings, shutting down at least one proceeding.



□ Ammon Bundy leads a discussion at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon, in January 2016. (Photo via Reuters/Jim Urquhart)

People's Rights recruits nationwide and has at least seven chapters with over 27,000 members, according to Bundy's and the group's social media pages.

For Bundy, whose prior acts of extremism have been grounded in his belief that the government is tyrannical, the need to fight it is already here. People's Rights is his newest vehicle to do so.

People's Rights has approximately 22,000 followers on social media. The group hasn't been linked to specific violent incidents, but Bundy's history and the organization's rise in the midst of an increase in right-wing backlash to public health policies as well as uncertainty during a pandemic may [feed fears that could erupt](#).

People's Rights uses an approach similar to that of the Kenosha Guard militia in Wisconsin, sending supporters regular calls to action.

The Kenosha Guard militia may have [played a role](#) in the shootings of three Kenosha Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters Aug. 25, two of whom died. Self-described militia member Kyle Rittenhouse, 17, has been charged with murder in the shootings.

The Kenosha Guard militia invited individuals via Facebook to come armed and meet at Civic Center Park in Kenosha, the site of the BLM protest. The Facebook invite garnered some 700 RSVPs.

As a result, citizen vigilantes with firearms showed up to patrol. Some walked the street while others stood atop a rooftop, in sniper positions. Police say Rittenhouse opened fire, killing Anthony Huber, 26, and Joseph "Jojo" Rosenbaum, 36, both of Kenosha, and injuring another protester.

The Kenosha killings point to tensions across the U.S., which have ratcheted up as armed militia and Patriot groups challenge lawmakers over coronavirus guidelines and confront and intimidate Black Lives Matter protesters in American cities, and as [boogaloo bois plot violent acts against government facilities](#).

Such tensions may end up benefitting Bundy's organization, making it more dangerous for the country at large.

According to details shared at People's Rights meetings, individuals who sign up are added to the organization's database, which sends out alerts for various calls to action. In the past, these have included requests for people to protest at state houses, a hospital, a sheriff's office and the homes of their opposition. The database provides the group with an opportunity to reach and unite a large cross-section of extremists via texts or emails. They can then be mobilized quickly to hit the streets to oppose protesters or public officials.

Since April, the organization has hosted and participated in more than a dozen activities, including armed protests, disruptions to public proceedings and criminal behavior. Based on the group's model and its leader Bundy, a full-time provocateur, a scenario akin to what happened in Kenosha is not out of the realm of possibility.

One of Bundy's main goals is expansion. He told an audience at a June 19 Idaho People's Rights meeting, "Before we are done, we will have a network all over Idaho and hopefully all over the United States that will have some pretty strong capabilities to support this network on multiple levels."

Bundy has also said he wants to spread their message throughout the world.

"There will be a great network across Idaho that can act immediately in the defense of somebody's liberties," he said at an Idaho People's Rights meeting held April 9.

Hatewatch reached out to Bundy via email, but received no response.

Nicholas Ramlow, a Libertarian candidate for the Montana House of Representatives in District 7, is a regional People's Rights leader. Ramlow has said the group wants to "establish an 'Uber-like' militia response system that can be mobilized at any time," [according to the Montana Human Rights Network](#), which monitors extremist activity.

Casey Whalen, a People's Rights leader in Washington with a large YouTube following, has said the group is "creating a communications network to dispatch people to assist local business owners or families being oppressed by tyrannical government."

The group posts propaganda-style videos and memes online that often feature pictures of nuclear families along with slogans about defending themselves from perceived threats, usually from the government.

One reads: "Who would you call if your family was in danger? What if they were in danger from the government? Protect Your Loved Ones."

Thus far, the group and its members have heavily capitalized on the coronavirus pandemic, using it for recruitment, promotion and a way to protest in the streets.

Bundy has said on social media that he believes coronavirus is real, but People's Rights has equated quarantine restrictions to tyranny, protesting mask mandates and stay-at-home guidelines in such places as Boise and Caldwell, Idaho, as well as Vancouver, Washington.

Bundy's first People's Rights event was held in Boise on April 12. He hosted an Easter service on his property to protest church closings during COVID-19 lockdowns, claiming religious liberty. Failed 2014 Idaho state Senate candidate Diego Rodriguez, who works with Freedom Man PAC, gave the sermon from behind a makeshift pulpit with a sign that read, "Defy Martial Law."

In Meridian, Idaho, on April 21, Bundy and several group members showed up to protest at the home of the police officer who had arrested Sara Brady, a woman who garnered national media attention when she was detained for refusing to leave a

playground that had been shut down by the state during coronavirus lockdowns.

The officer's name and photo were shared by the Libertarian think tank Idaho Freedom Foundation, a [supporter of People's Rights](#).

On May 8, Montana candidate Ramlow suggested [he would arrest public officials](#) if they enforced coronavirus restrictions, writing on his Facebook page, "If you are a business owner in Kalispell and you open your business, contact me immediately if a government official comes to you to enforce Governors [sic] DIEO," referring to Montana Gov. Steve Bullock's directive implementing executive orders regarding COVID-19. "Report it to me as a Criminal Complaint under Title 18 u.s.c, Section 242 and I will arrest them properly," Ramlow said, though he has no authority to do so.

On June 13, People's Rights supporters joined a who's who of antigovernment activists at the Liberate America event, held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Speakers and attendees included a who's who of the antigovernment and conspiracy-driven right, including John Jacob Schmidt of Redoubt News. He spoke at the event, and was joined by [far-right Washington State Republican representative Matt Shea](#), who was expelled from the state GOP caucus after a congressional investigative report revealed his links to domestic terrorism.

[Agenda 21 propagandist Tom DeWeese of the American Policy Center](#) was also there, along with representatives of the Idaho Light Foot Militia, which in 2020 has supported People's Rights, who provided security for the event. [Joey Gibson, leader of the right-wing group Patriot Prayer](#), attended, along with members of the [hate group Proud Boys](#) and the far-right conspiracy theorist group [John Birch Society](#).

On June 22, armed members of People's Rights appointed themselves as "crowd control" at the Idaho State Capitol, where far-right lawmakers were calling for a special legislative session about the state's coronavirus guidelines. "We're going to make sure that legislators don't have any trouble and everybody is good and peaceful," Bundy shared, [according to Idahopress.com](#). Asked about the possibility of an armed takeover at the Idaho Capitol, Bundy answered, "I sure hope it doesn't have to go to that level."

On June 22, July 2 and July 6, the Washington People's Rights chapter, led by [longtime Bundy supporter](#) Kelli Stewart, held multiple rallies in front of a city attorney's home and at City Hall in Vancouver, Washington. At least one was held in coordination with Patriot Prayer's Joey Gibson. The group was [protesting the arrest of a pet groomer who kept her business open during the shutdown](#).

The group also took part in a tent revival titled "Rage Against the State in Belgrade and Livingston, Montana" from July 3-4. The event was led by former white nationalist and antigovernment activist Roger Roots.

Later in July, members of People's Rights were invited by Whalen to join him at the Kootenai County courthouse in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Whalen was there defending himself against a criminal citation for taking down signs at a beach in Hayden, Idaho, that indicated that people from out of state should quarantine. The order was enforced by the sheriff's department, which Whalen claimed was usurping people's rights and acting tyrannical.

Whalen did not show up for his July court appearance. He was arrested on Aug. 29. He has since said that he would commit the same crime again, and he believes he would have more people doing it with him.

People's Rights has also disrupted public meetings.

On July 16, [members interrupted a special board meeting that was about to take place at the Southwest District of Health](#) in Caldwell, Idaho. The meeting agenda, which included responses to the coronavirus including a possible mask mandate, could be watched by the public over the virtual platform Zoom. Bundy's group wanted to go inside the building without masks. They were barred from entry, and Bundy shoved an employee. The police were called, but no one was arrested.

Two weeks later on Aug. 1, People's Rights members descended on the sheriff's office in

Nezperce, Idaho, to protest the detainment of Bundy supporter Sean Anderson, who was [arrested after allegedly shooting at a law enforcement officer during a traffic stop](#) in Ferdinand, Idaho, on April 18. Anderson had attended the Bundy standoff at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in 2016, where he was one of the last holdouts.

Bundy himself has been arrested twice while working with People's Rights, both times for disrupting the legislative process at the Idaho State Capitol.

Lawmakers met in a special session to discuss bills related to voting and coronavirus civil liability. People's Rights opposed RS28049, the civil liability bill that would provide immunity to individuals, private and public entities during the pandemic.

As an example of how People's Rights mobilizes, the group sent out an Aug. 23 call to action on Facebook inviting people to march at the Idaho capitol building the next day. "This march will demonstrate WE are AGAINST GOVERNMENT AGENTS BEING IMMUNE WHEN THEY INFRINGE UPON PEOPLE'S RIGHTS. What are Idaho government agents planning?"

The next day, People's Rights protesters forced their way into the Idaho House Gallery, breaking a glass door. Bundy addressed lawmakers in the Lincoln Auditorium during an open comment period. "We are tired of government force and we will only take it for so long," he said.

Protesters, including Bundy, were back at the Idaho Statehouse on Aug. 25. This time, Bundy refused to leave. He was eventually dragged out, still seated in his chair, and charged with resisting and obstructing officers and trespassing, all misdemeanors.

After his release, Bundy returned to the Idaho Statehouse the next day. He used the Idaho Senate Gallery as the site of his protest, and resisted requests to leave. He was carried out of the building in a wheelchair and charged with trespassing. He has now been barred from the building for the next year.

People's Rights protesters have broken laws, including outright defiance of those dealing with the coronavirus lockdown and trespassing. They have also forced the cancellation of at least one public meeting and caused chaos to erupt at the Idaho State House over multiple days.

In a letter to supporters about his arrests, which he posted on the Freedom Man blog on Aug. 26, Bundy wrote: "At this moment in time it is evident that our own government and our own law enforcement agencies are truly the greatest threat to our freedom. They must be reformed. They must be stopped from abusing the people."

As the [Lewiston Tribune in Idaho wrote in a July 23 editorial](#): "If Bundy is not held to account, it's only going to get worse. Just look at his record."

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that the Idaho Freedom Foundation shared the contact information of a local police officer. Spokesman Dustin Hurst said the group shared the officer's name and photograph on its Facebook page, something they now regret. Hurst said IFF is not a supporter of Ammon Bundy. They disagree with some of Bundy's tactics, Hurst says, but don't disavow him, "because he is a human being."

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